

**First Lady Jeannette Kagame's Remarks  
At the Global Gender Summit**

***Plenary Session, during the High-Level Segment:***

***Realising a Demographic Dividend through investments in  
Gender Equality***

Monday, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2019  
Kigali, Rwanda

**My President,**

**Excellency Sahle-Work Zewde,**

**President of the Federal Democratic Republic of  
Ethiopia,**

**My Dear Sister, Excellency Margaret Kenyatta, First Lady  
of the Republic of Kenya,**

**Excellency Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the  
African Union Commission,**

**President of the African Development Bank, Mr Akinwumi  
Adesina,**

**Honourable panellists,**

**Distinguished Guests and Partners,**

**Mesdames et messieurs,**

**Good Afternoon.**

As I begin, allow me to commend the African Development Bank and the Government of Rwanda, for their efforts and commitment to **‘Unpacking constraints to gender equality’**, as a fail-proof strategy to achieve sustainable economic growth, and true financial inclusion, for a holistic social transformation.

Growing up I thought and actually believed that **‘*what a man can do, a woman can do juts as well.*’** I maintain that stand.

As fate would have it, the irony of our dark history, suddenly

threw our women into a multitude of roles, as they had to be the mothers, husbands, fathers, brothers, comforters and guardians.

We soon realized that if we were to build strong communities in this post-genocide era, we had to be intentional in our choices, in order to realise a nation rooted in unity, dignity and prosperity.

### **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Sustainable socio-economic growth can only be achieved when everyone's full contribution to the market economy, is given its rightful value; but also, when access to health, education, profitable opportunities, and financial inclusion, are no longer the privilege of a selected few.

Realising a demographic gender dividend, therefore, requires all of us, to make the right investments, towards closing persisting gender gaps, and enabling women and girls, to be the true masters of their destiny.

A true understanding of how far we have come and how far we need to go, requires a deeper analysis that go beyond mere statistics. It requires us to take stock and inventory of our **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities** and **Threats**.

To achieve this vision of the ‘Rwanda we want’, we needed to place one of our **strengths**, characterized by the resilience of our Rwandan women and girls, at the forefront of our transformation.

Through inclusive policies, legal and strategic frameworks, we set a strong stage for gender equality, offering women and girls **opportunities**, to maximize their rights, and contribute to the country’s development, alongside their male counterparts.

Today, the number of women, participating in political decision making (61%); employed in key sectors, such as health (53.9%) and agriculture (54.6%), as well as the increase in girl’s enrolment in secondary (53.2%) and tertiary (52.7%) education, among others, speaks volumes of our determination, to achieve our social and economic transformation goals.

Despite these efforts, **weaknesses** and **threats** portend, which hinder the process to closing gender gaps and, therefore, reaping the desired demographic gender dividend.

Some of these inhibitors are:

1/ **Harmful and out-dated traditions and beliefs**, common in most of our countries, continue to limit women and girls’ perception of themselves, as change-makers and leaders, in their fields and communities,

2/ The **slow pace** with which **we teach men and boys, to be reliable partners**, and holding them accountable for their

responsibility in ensuring gender equality, perpetuate unfair conditions for women and girls in society.

**My Dear Sister,**

**Distingués invités,**

Un changement de '**mindset**' est donc essentiel pour combler les écarts existants, et tout particulièrement pour mettre un terme, au cercle vicieux de la pauvreté.

Nous pouvons y arriver grâce à des politiques appropriées, comprenant des mécanismes d'accès aux services financiers, pour les femmes.

Si nous espérons avoir un retour sur investissement dans les femmes et les filles, nous devons promouvoir leur confiance en elles-mêmes et leur indépendance, mais aussi veiller à ce que plus jamais elles ne soient confrontées à des obstacles, dans leurs quêtes de leadership.

Allow me here, to share a few examples of gender-targeted programmes we implement at my Foundation, **Imbuto**, aligning with priorities set at the macro level, such as Rwanda's **National Strategy for Transformation**, the **Agenda 2063** of the African Union, and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.

1/ Through our **Promotion of Girls Education programme**, we award the Best Performing Girls across the country, to promote outstanding academic performance among girls, while

encouraging the community at large, to invest, and take pride in their education.

2/ Through the '**Celebrating Young Rwandan Achievers Awards**' (CYRWA), we recognise young Rwandans, including young women, who are leading and transforming their sectors and communities, and last but not least,

3/ Through our **Mentorship programme**, we instil in young women and girls, the need to live purposeful lives and, through their mentors, encourage them to think beyond the limits set by society, tradition or religion, to reach for their highest goals.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As I conclude, let us ensure that women on the continent, are afforded the necessary tools, and opportunities, with an equitable policy environment, to dismantle the barriers standing in their way towards a more impactful life.

It calls for each of us to play our role:

**Women and girls** – we must organise and be each other's keeper.

**Youth** – you must be proactive in taking your lives in your own hands, and calling out inequality wherever it is perceived. You have what it takes to thrive, in this fast-changing world.

**Partners and stakeholders** – we must be innovative and relentless in our commitments to invest in, and level the field for all, especially women and girls.

**Policy makers** – you must be deliberate in placing women and girls, at the heart of transformative strategies and decisions.

Once again, thank you to the Government of Rwanda and the African Development Bank for offering this multi-stakeholder platform, to share best practices on gender equality progress.

Ensemble, renouvelons notre engagement à ne pas étouffer la voix de cette femme, qui ne demande qu'à prendre cette place, qui lui revient de droit.

I thank you for your kind attention.